

What is claimed is:

1. A sample collection apparatus, comprising:

a housing, said housing having an internal cavity sealed from the ambient environment outside the housing;

a receptacle holder, said receptacle holder being capable of holding one or more receptacles in communication with said internal cavity of said housing;

a receptacle conveyor, said receptacle conveyor being movable to transport one of said at least one receptacles to a filling station within said internal cavity of said housing where the at least one receptacle is fillable;

a flowable material feeder having an opening at said filling station within said internal cavity of said housing, said flowable material feeder being operable to feed material from a supply source into the at least one receptacle; and

a mechanism for moving the at least one receptacle from the filling station to an ejection port formed in the housing.

2. The sample collection apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a stopper removing or opening mechanism, said stopper removing or opening mechanism being operable to remove or open a stopper from the at least one receptacle when the at least one receptacle is located at said filling station to allow for the at least one receptacle to be filled by said flowable material feeder.

3. The sample collection apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said stopper removing or opening mechanism is operable to remove a screw-on or plug stopper from the at least one receptacle, open a port in the at least one receptacle, or penetrate a septum on the at least one receptacle.

4. The sample collection apparatus according to claim 2, further comprising stopper attaching mechanism, said stopper attaching mechanism being operable to attach a screw-on or

plug stopper to the at least one receptacle, close a port in the at least one receptacle, or close or seal a penetrated septum on the at least one receptacle.

5. The sample collection apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a filled receptacle holder, said filled receptacle holder being located at the ejection port of said housing and receiving the at least one receptacle from the filling station.

6. The sample collection apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said filled receptacle holder includes at least one container for holding a plurality of filled receptacles, said at least one container

7. The sample collection apparatus according to claim 6, wherein said at least one container is one of the group consisting of bags, jars, and boxes.

8. The sample collection apparatus according to claim 5, wherein said container has an open end sealed with the housing to form a barrier between the environment within the internal cavity of said housing and the ambient environment outside said housing.

9. The sample collection apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising an injection port formed in said housing, said receptacle holder being in communication with said injection port and being sealed with the housing to form a barrier between the environment within the internal cavity of said housing and the ambient environment outside said housing.

10. A device for collecting samples from within a sealed system, comprising:  
a housing, said housing having an internal cavity sealed from the ambient environment outside the housing;  
a plurality of receptacles, said plurality of receptacles being fillable with a flowable material while within said internal cavity of said housing.

11. The device for collecting samples from within a sealed system according to claim 10, further comprising at least one container for receiving said plurality of receptacles after said plurality of receptacles have been filled, said at least one container being sealed with said housing to form a barrier between the environment within said internal cavity of said housing and the ambient environment outside said housing.

12. The device for collecting samples from within a sealed system according to claim 11, wherein said at least one container is single blind-ended container for receiving said plurality of receptacles therein.

13. The device for collecting samples from within a sealed system according to claim 11, wherein said at least one container is a cluster of containers attached via a manifold to said housing.

14. The device for collecting samples from within a sealed system according to claim 11, wherein said at least one container is a plurality of open-ended containers connected in end-to-end relationship to form an integral tube, a first of said plurality of containers being sealed at one of open ends with said housing, and a last of said plurality of containers having a closed distal end, each of said plurality of containers being closable to contain one of said plurality of receptacles therein in an isolated manner.

15. The device for collecting samples from within a sealed system according to claim 14, wherein said last of said plurality is closable after a first of the filled receptacles is received therein to isolate said first filled receptacle from the environment within said internal cavity of said housing and from said outside environment, remaining of said plurality of containers remaining in an open condition with said internal cavity of said housing to receive a subsequent filled receptacle therein.

16. The device for collecting samples from within a sealed system according to claim 15, wherein each of said plurality of containers is closable at opposite ends thereof to isolate

adjacent of said plurality of containers from each other when a respective of said plurality of containers has received a filled receptacle therein.

17. The device for collecting samples from within a sealed system according to claim 15, wherein each of said plurality of containers is closable by one of the group consisting of heat sealing, zipper sealing, crimping, adhesive sealing, screw capping, and stoppering.

18. The device for collecting samples from within a sealed system according to claim 11, further comprising a flowable material supplier, said flowable material supplier being operable to supply a flowable material to one of said housing, said plurality of receptacles and said at least one container.

19. The device for collecting samples from within a sealed system according to claim 18, wherein said flowable material is from one of the group consisting of cleaning agents, sanitizing agents, sterilizing agents, neutralizing agents and decontaminating agents.

20. The device for collecting samples from within a sealed system according to claim 14, further comprising a flowable material supplier, said flowable material supplier being operable to supply a flowable material between adjacent of said plurality of open-ended containers when one of said plurality of open-ended containers has been closed to enclose one of said plurality of receptacles therein.

21. The device for collecting samples from within a sealed system according to claim 10, further comprising:

an injection port formed in said housing; and

a receptacle holder, said receptacle holder being in communication with said injection port and being sealed with the housing to form a barrier between the environment within the internal cavity of said housing and the ambient environment outside said housing.

22. A method of collecting a sample, comprising the steps of:

providing a housing having an internal cavity sealed from the ambient environment outside the housing;

providing a receptacle holder, said receptacle holder being capable of holding one or more receptacles in communication with said internal cavity of said housing;

transporting one of said receptacles to a filling station within said internal cavity of said housing;

filling said one receptacle with a flowable material at said filling station, while said receptacle is within said internal cavity of said housing; and

moving said receptacle from the filling station to an ejection port formed in the housing.